

A Call to Arms:

Recruiting & Enlistment of the Civil War Soldier



Clip from *Drive Them to Washington*, by Don Troiani. Courtesy of Historical Art Prints, Southbury, CT.

Background Information:

The firing on Fort Sumter that signaled to many Americans, North and South, the final disunion of the United States, led likewise to the establishment of armies for both sides. In the north, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to quell the infant rebellion, while Confederate President Jefferson Davis asked for 100,000 men to join the army and repel the invading Northerners. Young men by the tens of thousands flocked to enlistment and recruiting stations to volunteer their services for the coming battle that everyone anticipated.

For an overwhelming majority of these men, patriotism was their primary reason for deciding to go off to war. In the North, preservation of the Union and avenging the firing on the American flag and troops at Fort Sumter were the main themes echoed again and again at recruitment drives throughout the North. In the South, men enlisted to defend themselves against the invasion of what they saw as an aggressing army, bent on denying their right to secede from the United States.

Many men were also lured to the armies by their sense of adventure. For the school teacher from Providence, Rhode Island or the farmer in Tupelo, Mississippi, who had probably never in his life travelled farther than the next county, the war offered them a chance to travel and see sights that they had only dreamed about. It also gave them the opportunity to participate in what they saw as the glory and excitement of battle.

Monetary gain was another of the reasons that induced men to enlist. However, the pay of the common soldier of the Civil War was rather meager. At a pay rate of only \$13 per month, there were few men who enlisted in the Union Army because military service was a well-paying job. Confederate soldiers were allotted by law \$11 per month. However, due to the economic difficulties associated with forming a new nation and simultaneously fighting a war, inflation greatly reduced the actual worth of that paycheck.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to describe how the common Civil War soldier in 1861 was young, lacked military experience, and did not generally appreciate the gravity of the war he was preparing for.
2. Students will be able to explain that civilians were immediately affected by the start of the war in that when the soldiers left to fight, they deprived their communities of the skills and trades they had.
3. Students will be able to list three (3) countries from which men came to fight for the Union and Confederate Armies.

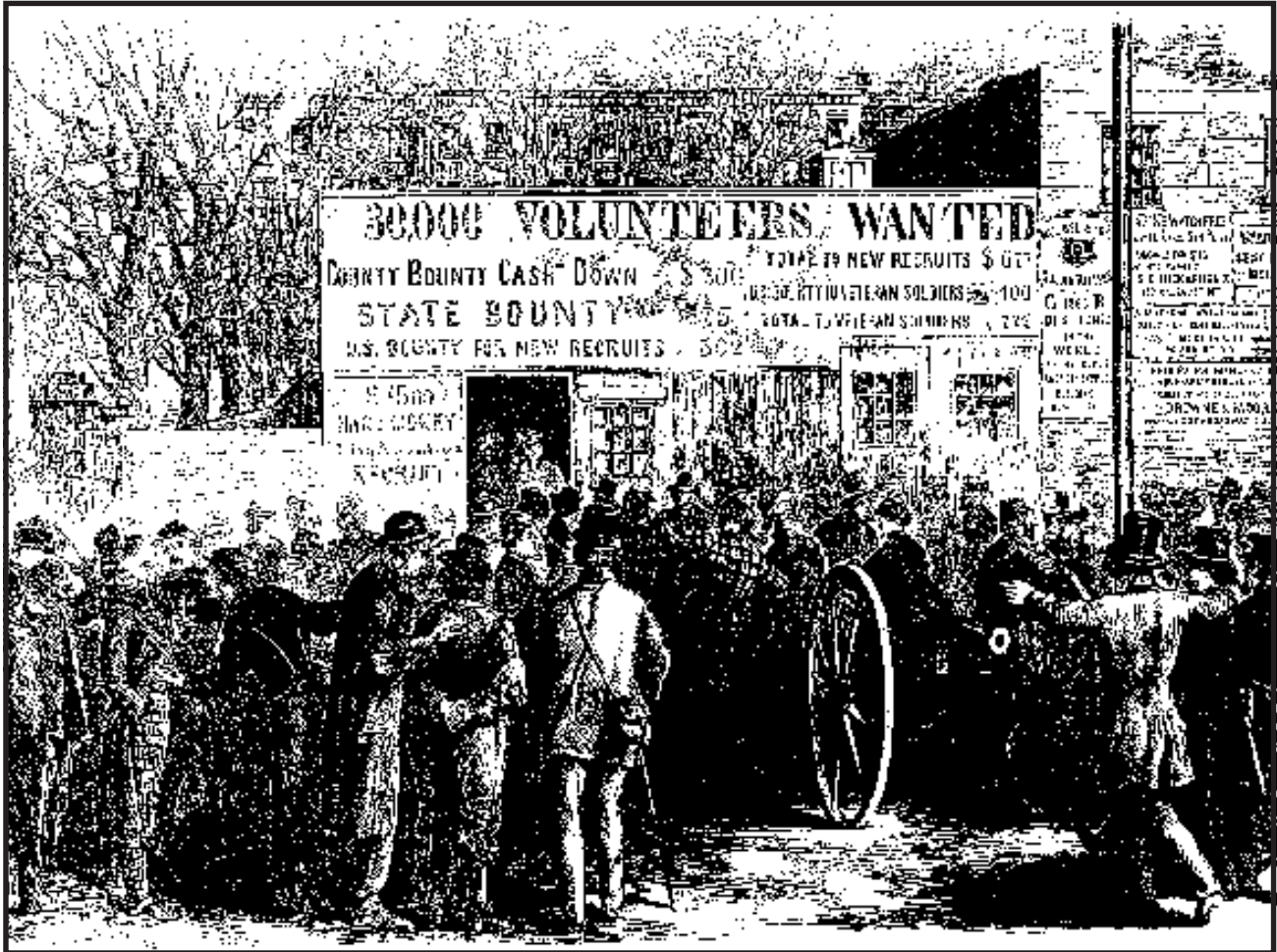
This module of the Baptism of Fire program addresses the following Standard(s) of Learning:

National: Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction, 2b

Virginia: History/Social Science VS.1, VS.7, & USI.9.



Some troops received a cash bonus, or bounty, for enlisting. This bounty was often as much as \$300. Occasionally, men would attempt to make a living solely on collecting the various enlistment bounties. Known as “bounty jumpers”, these men would enlist in a particular regiment, collect the bounty, and then desert. They would soon show up at another enlistment post and start the process over again.



THE COMMON SOLDIER OF THE CIVIL WAR

From 1861-1865, almost 3.5 million men served in the armed forces of the Union and the Confederacy. And while they may have enlisted for varying personal reasons and come from a wide variety of backgrounds, the fighting men of the Civil War were in many ways more similar than dissimilar.

Age

While there were notable exceptions, the men who decided the Civil War from 1861-1865 were between the ages of 18 and 29. However, youthful patriotism in both the young and the young at heart, induced many men, and indeed boys, to volunteer their services to the respective armies of the Union and the Confederacy. Young teenagers often enlisted as musicians or drummer boys. The youngest documented Confederate soldier was 11-year old Charles Hay of Alabama. Within the Union lines, Edward Black was the conflict's youngest warrior: he was a mere nine years old when he joined the 21st Indiana in



1861. At the other end of the scale, the distinction of the oldest volunteer goes to one Curtis King, who enlisted in a Union regiment at the ripe old age of 80. However, King, like many of the war's aged enlistees, quickly found that youthful enthusiasm alone wasn't enough to endure the rigors of military service. He served but a few months before being discharged on account of disability.

Nationalities

In many ways, the armies of the north and south, reflected the melting pot of their respective regions at the time. Numerous factors had caused a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants in the United States in the years prior to the Civil War. Events such as the Irish potato famine and the European revolutions of 1848 created an atmosphere abroad that was conducive to wide-spread emigration. Here in the United States, the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution and the continuing westward expansion movement created numerous opportunities for those seeking a place to settle and start a new life.

The vast majority of these immigrants settled in the northern states. The 1860 census showed that approximately 1/3 of the northern population had been born outside of the United States. Correspondingly, about twenty-five percent of men who served in the Union armies were either a first or second generation immigrant. By comparison, slightly less than ten percent of the Confederacy's soldiers were foreign born.

German immigrants made up the largest contingent of foreign-born Federal soldiers. Approximately 200,000 Germans swelled the ranks of the Union forces from 1861-1865. As the Union army moved towards Manassas in July, 1861, their ranks included two all-German regiments, the 8th and 29th New York Infantries, commanded by Lt. Colonel Julius Stahel and Colonel Adolph VonSteinwehr, respectively.

Men of Irish descent also made up a significant portion of the Union armies during the Civil War. Some 150,000 Irishmen donned the Union blue during the war. At the First Battle of Manassas, the 69th New York Infantry marched into battle proudly displaying their nationality on a battle flag resplendent with an Irish harp and shamrock on a kelly green field (this regiment and battle flag are discussed in further detail in the "Rally 'Round the Flag" pre-visit activity).

Other nationalities contributing troops in large numbers to the Civil War included Canada (50,000) and England (45,000). In fact, German, Irish, Canadian, and English nationals made up approximately 5/6ths of the foreign-born troops who served in the war. Countless other nationalities participated including Scandinavian, Swiss, French, Italian, Mexican, and Polish.

The unit that epitomized this melting pot among the common soldiers was the 39th New York Infantry, present during the First Battle of Manassas. Nicknamed the Garibaldi Guards, after a famous Italian revolutionary, their ranks were filled with no less than *fifteen* nationalities, including Englishmen, Swiss, Croats, Bavarians, Cossacks, Italians, Sepoys, Germans, and Algerian Zouaves of the French Foreign Legion. The companies of the regiment consisted of three Hungarian, three German, and one each Italian, Swiss, French, and Spaniards and Portugese. Their colonel, who was Hungarian, was often required to give orders in seven different languages!



Garibaldi Guard



A Case Study: The 27th Virginia Infantry

As disunion became a reality and war fever swept the nation in the late winter and spring of 1861, countless towns, communities, and counties formed local military units, or companies, in hopes of participating in the coming conflict. In the western Virginia, numerous local units began to crop up. In Alleghany County, three separate units were training and drilling in the spring of 1861. Two more were being formed in Greenbrier County, and Monroe County was raising a company of its own. When Virginia passed the Ordinance of Secession and the state's departure from the Union was official, many of these local units offered their services to the Commonwealth. With the fledgling nation needing troops to defend its borders, it did not take long for orders to arrive for these local units.

In late April, with the secession of Virginia from the Union finally official, the commanders of these local militia units were ordered to "report with your command to the commanding officer at Harpers Ferry." On May 30, 1861, several of these disparate commands were banded together and were incorporated into an army created by and for the state of Virginia as the 6th Regiment of Virginia Volunteers. Shortly thereafter, the various state forces were combined into a national army for the Confederate States of America. On July 1, the 6th Regiment of Virginia Volunteers was accepted into the Confederate army and designated the 27th Virginia Infantry. Among the former local units who were now part of the 27th Virginia were:

Company A - Alleghany Roughs. This unit was raised in March, 1861 in Alleghany County by Captain Thompson McAllister, a transplanted Pennsylvanian. They had originally named themselves the Alleghany Light Infantry. However, the name changed when "in their exuberance at the prospect of going off to war . . . [they] cut up some very high capers which so worried the citizens . . . that, in derision they dubbed them the "Alleghany Roughs." The troops liked the new nickname and kept it throughout the war.

Company B - Virginia Hibernians. This company from Alleghany County was mustered into service for one year on May 15, 1861. Because their ranks were filled with many Irish immigrants, they chose the nickname "Hibernians", which means something from or pertaining to Ireland.

Company C - Alleghany Rifles. The last of Alleghany County's three companies, the Rifles were originally assigned to the 2nd Virginia Infantry, but were transferred to the 27th on May 31, 1861.

Company D - Monroe Guards. Raised in Monroe County, this company had been in existence for almost a year and a half by the time they enlisted on May 9, 1861. They had been formed in late 1859 after John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The citizens of Monroe County were concerned that such a violent insurrection could occur near their homes, and raised the Monroe Guards as a measure of protection.

Company E - Greenbrier Rifles. This unit was from Greenbrier County, and were also known as the Lewisburg Rifles, after the county seat where the men enlisted. They enlisted for one year's service on May 15, 1861 and were originally assigned to the 5th Virginia Infantry, before being reassigned to the 27th.

Company F - Greenbrier Sharp Shooters. Also of Greenbrier County, the Sharp Shooters enlisted on May 11, 1861 and were mustered into Confederate service one week later.



Company G - Shriver Grays. This company came up with their designation by combining the name of their captain, Daniel M. Shriver, with the color of the uniforms they designed. They were from Wheeling, Virginia, in a region of the state with such loyal Union sympathy that they seceded from Virginia in order to remain with the Union. The region became the state of West Virginia in 1863.

Company H - Rockbridge Rifles. This unit was formed in Lexington in 1859, following John Brown's failed raid on Harpers Ferry. They were considered the "pride of Lexington" and were often called upon to appear at various city functions. Though records are unclear, the Rockbridge Rifles may have been with the 4th Virginia Infantry at the First Battle of Manassas. The captain of the company was Samuel Houston Letcher, whose brother, John, was governor of Virginia.

From 1861-1865, more than 1,260 men would serve in the ranks of the 27th Virginia Infantry. As they had been formed from one of Virginia's richest farming regions, it is not surprising that most of the men listed their occupation at the time of enlistment as farmer. Other occupations well-represented among the men of the 27th Virginia included laborers, carpenters, clerks, students, and blacksmiths.

Forty-nine of the men enlisted in the 27th Virginia were of foreign birth, with the vast majority being Irishmen. Other nationalities represented among the ranks included German, Italian, English, and Welsh. The average member of the regiment was 25.9 years old and at least five feet tall, though the tallest soldier in the unit was a towering six feet, eight inches tall.

After the companies were formed into the 27th Virginia Infantry, they were placed under the command of Colonel William Westmoreland Gordon, a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia. To Gordon and his second in command, Lt. Colonel John Echols, fell the task of turning this amalgamation of local militia units into a cohesive fighting force.

For the men of the 27th Virginia, a typical day customarily began with a 5:00 a.m. wake-up call. Before breakfast was served at 7:00, the men drilled for an hour and a half while the surgeons examined. The first call for guard mount (or the changing of pickets and sentries on guard duty) was sounded at 8:00, the second at 8:30. More squad drill was on tap from 10:30 to 11:30 and battalion drill (similar to squad drill, but with more men) was held from 11:30 to 12:30. A two-hour break for lunch was followed by another hour of squad drill at 2:30. Dress parade began at 6:00, with retreat scheduled at sundown. The men had dinner at 7:00, followed by tattoo at 9:30. Their day ended with the playing of taps at 10:00.

Throughout the late spring and early summer of 1861, the men of the 27th Virginia drilled and marched at Harpers Ferry, all the while longing for a chance to prove themselves in battle. The tedium of camp life was interrupted in late May when a portion of the regiment was selected for a detail assignment. On May 23, the citizens of Virginia went to the polls in a referendum vote to approve the Ordinance of Secession that had been passed by the State Convention. There was concern about the possibility of civil unrest at the polls and the 27th's mission was to report to Martinsburg and help keep the peace on election day. The mission was accomplished with a minimum of disruption and the unit returned to Harpers Ferry when the election was over.

Back in Harpers Ferry, the restlessness of the unit quickly returned as the men were once again subjected to the daily tedium of drill and camp life. The men of the 27th Virginia chafed all the more as they watched their brigade mates, the 5th Virginia, participate in the "Battle of Falling Waters" with Brigadier

General Thomas J. Jackson on July 2. Shortly after this engagement, the 27th Virginia and the rest of the Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley moved from Harpers Ferry to Winchester, a position of greater strategic value.

The tedium came to an end suddenly on July 18. Couriers were seen riding into and out of camp in all directions, bearing dispatches and messages, the contents of which the men of the 27th could only speculate. By 3:00 that afternoon, however, the army was in motion. They were ordered to pack up and began marching. Their destination was open to speculation: were the Federals headed their way? Was it another false alarm? Or was this the start of an event of even larger magnitude?

Once outside of Winchester, the men had their answer: General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard and his Confederate forces at Manassas Junction were under attack by the Federal army under General Irvin McDowell. The Valley Army, including the 27th Virginia Infantry, was on its way to help out. The news was greeted with cheers by the men in the ranks. "I remember how we cheered," wrote one of the men, "... and the swinging stride with which we set out, as if determined to make the whole march that night."

The 27th Virginia Infantry was finally getting the opportunity they had longed for for almost 3 months of restless inactivity: they were going into battle!

Activities for the Students

1. Distribute to each student one biographical sketch from the roster of the 27th Virginia Infantry, a Confederate regiment. This information can be found in the file "[27thVAEnlistments](#)." (Be sure to issue them in numerical order, as they have been compiled in a specific order for the purposes of future activities).

Explain to the students that this is the biography of an actual soldier who fought in the Civil War and fought at the First Battle of Manassas. Have the students read over the biography sheet, and use that information to complete the enlistment papers found in their activity books or from the file "[EnlistmentCertificate](#)." Please note all requested information on the enlistment papers are not available for some soldiers.

Note: While the enlistment papers used in this exercise are based on the actual documents which were in use at the time, this form is not an exact replica of those which were used. It is based on a furlough form that was used for Union troops, and is used here for the purposes of the exercise. In actuality, Confederate forces rarely had such a documented enlistment form.

Factoid:

During the 1st Manassas Campaign, the 27th Virginia was brigaded (grouped) under the command of Thomas J. Jackson with the following Virginia units:

- 2nd Virginia Infantry
- 4th Virginia Infantry
- 5th Virginia Infantry
- 33rd Virginia Infantry
- Rockbridge Artillery

When this brigade's Brigadier General was awarded the nickname "Stonewall" by Confederate Brigadier General Barnard Bee during the battle, that nickname carried to the brigade who would later be known as the "Stonewall Brigade." Throughout the war the "Stonewall Brigade" earned a reputation for being hard fighters and was one of the most respected Confederate infantry brigades.

Question

- Ask the students what the nickname "Stonewall" means? How did the nickname contribute to the brigade's morale and effectiveness in battle?



2. Have the students share with the class the information regarding their soldier. When finished, have the class consider the following questions:

A. Age

- who was the youngest soldier? the oldest?
- what does the approximate average age appear to be?
- Have the students graph the ages of the various soldiers

B. Birthplace

- Were all of the soldiers born in Virginia?
- Were any born in any other states in the south? in the north?
- Were any of the soldiers born outside of the United States? (Italy, Ireland, Germany, Canada, Wales) Ask the students why a foreigner might want to fight for Virginia (or any other state for that matter) during the Civil War.

C. Occupation

- What are some of the jobs that the soldiers had prior to the Civil War?
- Which appears to be most common? (farmers, students)
- What profession seems startlingly absent? (soldier) Ask the students how this lack of military background among the unit might affect how they fight on the battle-field.
- Of the occupations listed, have the class pick the four that they would most want to have in the regiment, and explain their choices. How would the absence of those four people affect the lives of their families and their fellow townspeople left behind?

D. Geography

- On a map of Virginia, have the students find where their soldiers were born, lived, and/or enlisted. What areas or counties are they concentrated in or around? Some of the men will have enlisted in what is now West Virginia. Explain to the students that the western portion of Virginia had strong Union sentiment and that portion of the state seceded from Virginia to remain in the Union. It renamed itself West Virginia, and on June 20, 1863 became our 35th state.

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